

Placing Digital Literacy in Audiovisual Translation Studies

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Abstract

Audiovisual translation (AVT) is fast becoming an independent specialization requiring several linguistic, filmic and technical skills. Digital literacy is one such skill that plays a prominent part in the discipline and profession of AVT and consequently should have its place in any course on AVT. The paper looks at the situation of audiovisual translation in Arabic and argues that while AVT as a discipline is non-existent, steps should be taken to include filmic and digital literacy skills in the traditional translation program. The research examines some of the recent examples where digital literacy could have been applied to better results.

Keywords: Audiovisual translation, conferences, digital literacy, visual culture, youth and literacy.

Introduction

The events in North Africa in the early weeks of January 2011 caught governments and academia in the region by surprise. Youth and social media have helped in bringing about unprecedented change: the Arab Spring. Exactly two decades earlier in 1991, the media world was revolutionized with the reach of news channel CNN and its power. It was digital technology that enabled one channel to inspire news channels in every country in the world where the Nightly News became part of the entertainment program. The emergence of satellite TV channels, and soon after the launch of AL Jazeera in 1996, changed the media, culture and educational scenes in the region beyond recognition. Digital technology began to dominate almost every aspect in Arab society from computers to cameras, banking to billboards and from games to gadgets. When the Arab Spring began in Tunisia in December 2010, Egypt January 2011 and Libya in February 2011 and soon after elsewhere (Yemen and Syria), it was obvious that two factors dominate the scene: youth and social media. The Egyptian government, for example, was faced with a young generation that mastered Facebook, texting and web sites to a degree that it had to turn off the Internet and mobile networks in a desperate bid to outfox the youthful masses. The youth who mobilized the masses were at the forefront of a new age and literate in a new cultural form: digital media. Despite the modest economic and educational realities the potential of digital literacy was plainly obvious from the start of the Egyptian revolution. It is against this background that Arabic translation scholars are invited to rethink Arabic translation studies and to espouse the new technology to help achieve the aspirations of a generation that is young, digitally-literate and impatient with the slow pace of print culture and its antiquated values.

Arabic translation studies

Translation history in Arabic is both long and rich. It shows a deep appreciation of the cross-cultural activity in numerous places that served as beacons of enlightenment when dark ages were dominating elsewhere (Baker and Saldanha: 2008). The cities of Baghdad, Cordoba and Cairo are examples of strong translation movements that had an influence that far exceeded their geographical boundaries (Barnes: 1941). Today, every university in the Arab world has a foreign language school and a translation department that in addition to teaching and training conducts research on translation between Arabic and English and several other languages. Translation schools in Tangiers, Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, and Baghdad have been traditionally the powerhouse of translator training in the region. Other institutions in Algiers, Alexandria, Beirut, Casablanca and Medina embark on large-scale translation activities that involve the training of translators and interpreters. There is a network of translation schools in the Arab world and despite the available formal nexus there is however little contact and cooperation. This is obvious as there is no pan-Arab translation conference, or an Arab translation journal or even a single recognized translation web site. The absence of a viable professional translation society in many countries has had a negative impact on the development of a vibrant translation profession locally. Many Arab countries do not have a society for translators despite the existence of an academic institution teaching translation and the existence of a strong professional activity in translation and interpreting. Quite often, when a translation association exists, it tends to be shackled by narrow interests and limited professional scope. Given the vital need for translation in Arab societies, such an establishment could and should be a centre for enlightenment in the service of the community and the translation profession. It is not unusual when a foreign cultural

organisation takes the initiative and offers a translation event such as the Swedish cultural centre in Alexandria or the Instituto Cervantes in Cairo who organize translation seminars or subtitling for Spanish films shown in Egypt. The Arab Organisation for Translation, established in 1999, and based in Beirut provides a forum for translation academics and publishes a quarterly journal. However, its impact professionally and pedagogically is yet to be measured and determined. Its activities remain to be felt by both the students of translation and most importantly the practitioners who need constant guidance and development.

The fragmented professional scene of translation in Arabic is however offset by the existence of prestigious translation awards in some parts of the Arab world particularly in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. These awards are internationally recognized and come with handsome financial rewards. National translation programs sprang in Cairo in the early years of the Twentieth century and in the 1960s the government launched a book translation and publication initiative. With demographic, economic and technological changes there became a need for a more responsive translation initiative. A lot of debate in the country led to the examination of different models for a viable and socially responsible translation policy in Egypt. The effort culminated with the establishment, in 1996, of the National Program for Translation. Later in 2009 it gained more status and recognition and became an independent public organ known as the National Centre. Since then it has published several titles, initiated a translation award and the national Translator's Day. However, it remains a cultural phenomenon rather than a development tool. Notwithstanding the hurdles facing it, including limited budget and resources, the output remains small in a country that relies on translation in almost every aspect of life. Likewise, in Tunisia, the National Translation Centre was established in 2006 and had 2008 dedicated as the National Year of translation. The Tunisian initiative, the first of its kind in the Arab world, remained too 'official' high on celebration and short on programs that are relevant to practicing or aspiring translators. Similarly, the immediate benefits or effects the national translation year had on the average citizen remain to be determined.

Baghdad 1988

Translation conferences in the Arab world are alive but not well. What they lack is long-term vision and purpose. Translation conferences in Arabic tend to be held on an *ad hoc* basis with little relation to what was discussed previously or what will be examined in the following conference. One of the reasons is that the organisation of a translation conference is seen, more often than not, as an academic activity by the professor in charge and not as an academic policy of the institution. This explains why some conferences never continue, and why a large number of conferences today bear the low number of the first, second, third or fourth conference on translation despite the long history of the institution and the activity in the country. Furthermore, what detracts from the viability of translation conferences in Arabic is the inadequate selection of topics to be discussed. Quite often, topics are recycled, narrowly-focused or simply confused with other areas of research. For example, the history of the House of Wisdom in Baghdad and the translation movement in the 9th Century has been a staple topic for too long. The over-emphasis on literary and religious translation obscures other relevant translation topics that need attention and discussion. Topics such as machine-aided translation, electronic resources, the online content, web site maintenance, translation ethics in the digital age, localisation and audiovisual translation are not addressed. As can be seen from the list all topics relate to digital

technology. Other topics such as religion, politics, literature and history of translation ought not to be included as the primary foci. Quite often they represent the work and research interests of senior faculty alone. Given the economic and demographic situation in the region, more attention should be given to translator development, translation research, and translation case studies. It is insightful to remember that this opinion was raised and discussed during the first Pan-Arab Translation conference held in Baghdad in March 1988. The huge conference was well organized and enjoyed the patronage of the government of the day and the sponsorship of senior organisations such as the Arab League. It was hailed as the conference that will usher in a new age of Arabic translation policy with recommendations designed to encourage cooperation not only between academic institutions but also with industry.

Doha and other conferences in 2013

While recent conferences in Abu Dhabi, Baghdad and Doha (all held in 2013) attempt to shed more light on the training of translators and enabling them to acquire relevant and practical skills, the results are of limited benefit to young, beginning and freelance practitioners. As almost half the number of translation graduates end up working as full-time translators, the current translation pedagogy does not consider the other half that actually chooses to work on a freelance basis and in areas that are not even considered by the teaching faculty. Translation pedagogy tends to focus more on the political/economic and literary fields to the exclusion of technical, scientific and audiovisual fields. Likewise, professional ethics is not an area that is considered in the translation/interpreting degree. To my knowledge, there has never been a comparative study between the career paths of a full-time and a freelance practitioner in the Arab context. The lack of a well-defined conference policy that looks at the various aspects of each stage of the translation process; from training translators to employability to actual professional work and publication, needs to be tackled first in order to guarantee better and wider benefits. For instance, some of the 2013 conferences offered hands-on training sessions to a limited number of practitioners (Abu-Dhabi) while others followed the 30-minute presentation-style talks (Baghdad and Doha) but neither offered conference proceedings.

Translation conferences at Arab universities tend to shy away from controversial, complex and contemporary issues and find comfort and security in historical and well-trodden topics. For instance, the issue of “military interpreters” working and assisting the American invasion of Iraq has not received sufficient attention. The issue has professional, ethical as well as pedagogic aspects. Likewise, in the Gulf States there are sixteen million foreign nationalities working, residing and traveling and many of them appear before the local Arabic-speaking, Sharia-law-governed court and face the inquisitorial system (as opposed to the adversarial system applied in the English-speaking world) and yet there is no training in legal or court interpreting. The court interpreting service offered to non-Arabic-speaking foreigners in most Arab countries and particularly in the Gulf States has not been examined despite the political and economic significance such service has to the state. Medical interpreting is equally a huge area that remains outside the scope of the traditional translation degree in most Gulf universities despite obvious benefits to the native and Arabic-speaking residents. Likewise, the Arab and particularly Muslim image in western culture deserves to be examined from a translation point of view. For over a century the image of Arabs and Muslims in the west has been less than acceptable and notwithstanding the colonial past, the Hollywood contribution and American foreign

policy towards the Arab world, the image could have been better translated. The experience gained from what is essentially an exercise in public relations would have a direct bearing on how to deal with the offensive Danish cartoons that touched on one of the most revered symbols of the Muslim faith. Similarly, to what extent have the formal translation authority, centre or university department capitalized on the opportunities made available by the Internet and digital technology? For example, a generation or so ago, the book was the popular and preferred form of reading but today Arab society is characterised but young people who do not read but watch satellite TV channels, download, cut and paste, constantly. In this age, does translation matter? And if yes, then in what form? And for whom should national translation policies be designed? These questions are among many others that a pan Arab translation conference needs to tackle (Gamal: 2007). In the absence of cooperation and coordination among Arab translation organisations, the incident of a book translated in Casablanca and re-translated and published again in Dubai is still a very real possibility.

It is 25 years since the last Pan-Arab Translation Conference that was held in Baghdad in March 1988. The conference was a huge event with a well-designed agenda and ended up with recommendations for follow up and continued cooperation. However, the Baghdad spirit soon fizzled out and it marked the end of an age as translation studies was gaining a new stimulus that would make it a discipline sui generis (Snell-Hornby: 1995). Translation conferences continue to be held in Baghdad and in various other cities in the Arab world but there is a noticeable lack of vision and purpose, or perhaps both. Translation conferences in the Arab context need to engage industry and freelance practitioners and be relevant to the community and the translation profession. Anything less than that risks the activity becomes a mere vehicle or façade for academic researchers to showcase their theoretical research. As explained above, translation conferences should be like the modern Olympics, not an opportunity to show off facilities and resources but an activity to generate relevant opportunities and transferable skills.

The Arab *Digital Spring*

The Arab Spring that shook North African capitals from Tunis to Cairo and Benghazi and in western Asia from Damascus to Sanaa underscored some vital facts: youth take to (digital) technology faster than their parents, the youthful population of the Arab world must be given the opportunity to express itself and to share in governing and the fact that the current education system has failed both the young and the nation. The digital revolution broke barriers, abolished borders and introduced new concepts, values and behaviours. Two of these changes had a tremendous impact on the young: satellite channels and the Internet. It must be remembered that such technological changes occurred in an Arab society that is traditionally conservative, patriarchal and religious. Globalisation and its harsh realities were not phased in but imposed rather harshly in a business context that relies heavily on government subsidies and suffers a weak private sector and high unemployment among the young. The labour force is largely not multi-skilled and therefore inflexible and the absence of a viable and relevant vocational education/training sector leaves the market unable to deal with changes both economic and technical. The 2013 World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report (Schwab: 2013) paints a sombre picture of the global competitiveness of Egypt and Tunisia. It places the education system and the flexibility of the workforce among the last countries examined. This is hardly surprising as the

education system; both general and vocational has been stagnant and backward. This has led to the proliferation of foreign universities in the region and particularly in Egypt where a generation ago there was only one foreign university the American University in Cairo (established in 1919). Today in addition to a French university, there is a German, British, Canadian, Russian and a Japanese university in the country. Apart from the social equality issue, the controversy over the opening, ownership, the language of instruction and supervision of the foreign universities has not abated.

The advent of the Internet has brought obvious benefits to the professional translation community and to society however it also brought some serious challenges that ought to be examined. Just as online *fatwas* and online prescriptions must be challenged by the religious and medical authorities, translation departments do not seem to consider the online world as a viable opportunity. The Internet is under-utilized pedagogically and professionally. This is gleaned from the web sites of the translation schools which appear to be static, frugal and non-interactive. The principles of accessibility, interactivity and sharing of knowledge do not appear to be observed. This is a rather significant observation because it reflects a philosophy that will impact on the professional future of graduates. Familiarity with the online world is not only important to graduates but also the ability to interact and contribute content online. Against this background, translation departments in the Arab world have a role to play in the post-Arab Spring. Translation has been and will be a vital link to the outside world, both the west and increasingly the east (Mahmoud: 1989), and the often-cited literary image of translation being a 'bridge' and a 'window' to the other will have to be replaced by that of a *link* and a *web site*. This means that the traditional translation degree must be revolutionized to take advantage of the new technology and to harness its potential before unprofessional or unwanted practices take root. The new translation degree needs to espouse digital technology in order to be effective not only in teaching translation but also in creating opportunities for graduates.

A new form of literacy

The new age of digital technology ushered in a plethora of digital tools and toys that have become indispensable. Yet, most translation departments in the Arab world have been slow and reluctant in espousing the new technology and its culture. The slow adoption and adaptation to digital technology could be attributed to cost, complexity and culture. There is no denial that digital technology is not cheap particularly at times of social and political upheaval. Furthermore, not being familiar with some of the basic digital toys tends to slow the adoption of the new technology. Most faculty members who are at the decision-making level grew up in pre-digital times and are, perhaps, unable to anticipate the impact or influence digital culture will have on society. This notion is gleaned through the conspicuous absence of sessions dedicated to audiovisual translation, machine translation, localisation, DVD authoring and content management systems (CMS) at translation conferences. While other professional societies may examine the role of the Internet on higher education or computational linguistics and the like, the point here is that the translation degree at most Arab universities remains paper-based, literary-focused and teacher-centred. The translation degree needs to be revamped and expanded to include different software programs that enable trainee/practicing translators to acquire relevant internet-based skills, include new topics and specialisations such as international law, arbitration,

copywriting, intellectual property, management, localization, professional ethics and finally to acquire a much higher level of digital literacy.

Digital literacy means the ability to create, access and understand digital resources (Gilster: 1997). The Arab Spring has clearly shown that many young people are already digitally-literate and able to create and access digital resources. Young people who grew up with Gameboy and PlayStation in the 1990s are now using smart phones and digital video cameras and are able to create video clips and to upload them on YouTube as can be seen in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. Some of these files are uploaded with subtitles into English and other languages as well. However, translation departments need to be at the forefront of the new visual culture since the screen is now replacing the print format and “we are surrounded by screens” (Gambier 2003: 171). Visual culture necessitates that film become part and parcel of the educational process. This means film material is used in the classroom for teaching, learning and discussion. Filmic material does not solely refer to documentaries or educational films but also to feature films. The latter is an area that has not received sufficient attention by educationalists, sociologists or psychologists despite the significant role cinema plays in the formative years of millions in Egypt and elsewhere. Feature films, and particularly those based on a novel by a prominent writer like Naguib Mahfouz provide a rich source for discussion, analysis and comparative studies. For instance, Mahfouz’s most popular novel *Midaq Alley* written in 1947 and adapted into a film by Hassan Al-Imam in 1963 has not been examined in class. It is *Midaq Alley’s* 50th anniversary this year and the filmic opus needs to be examined for several reasons: its artistic merit as a film of significant form, a comparative study of its adaptation from the novel and more significantly to examine the subtitling into English (and French). One of the most salient benefits of using film in class is the sharpening of visual culture tools and the acquisition of film literacy. These are essential tools in the new digital age. The power of the image, in a culture that still has a high percentage of people illiterate, is a serious one. Even in highly literate societies visual culture is a significant part of the overall cultural framework as seen in France recently. French newspaper, *Libération*, removed all its images from its 14th November 2013 issue to underscore the “power and importance” of images in today’s world and also the difficulties the photojournalistic industry is facing (Laurent: 2013). The crude YouTube film about Prophet Muhammad that was aired in September 2012 inflaming Muslims from Tunisia to Indonesia attests to the power of the Internet. Bradshaw (2012) concurs

“There is naturally a great deal of ultra-dodgy stuff out there on the web, with no gatekeepers to enforce levels of technical competence or ideological good taste. All sorts of murky videos can be accessed. Throughout both east and west, a whole generation is disenchanted with conventional media and looks to the web, with its plethora of user-generated content, for explanations”.

This is a fine example that illustrates how the traditional translation degree needs to develop and to become more pro-active and responsive to society’s needs and trends. The increasing reliance on screens to access information and entertainment, the increasing number of gadgets that use screen from the Internet to iPhones and tablets and the increasing importance of the visual content in our life means that the translation department needs to see translation taught, created and delivered within the audiovisual format. Today, DVDs are not only about feature films and documentaries

but cover almost everything: children cartoons, how to renovate your house, corporate videos, tourist promotion, investments, hobbies, private tuition, health issues and have even replaced the traditional election leaflet as Australian candidate Clive Palmer (who wants to build another Titanic) organized a DVD-drop instead of a letter-drop in his election campaign in Sydney in September 2013 (Palmer 2013).

Contextualizing audiovisual translation

Audiovisual translation studies seek to examine how translation is created and designed to be produced and consumed through the audiovisual format (Diaz Cintas, Matamala and Neves: 2010). While traditional translation is primarily concerned with the text, author, readership as well as other extra-linguistic features (of text) and factors of producing the final product (advertisement, children publications, the fine print, etc.) audiovisual translation is essentially concerned with the constraints imposed on the translation as the original audiovisual text employs two different channels that do not always complement each other. More often than not it challenges the translator as the translation needs to fit the format it is produced for: the screen.

In this respect, audiovisual translation is not primarily or merely concerned with feature films, subtitling and dubbing. It is concerned with any and all forms of audiovisual presentation be it a documentary, a 30-second video clip on YouTube, the news bulletin, an 8-minute corporate promotional video, a full documentary on a technical subject or a promotional DVD on the Pyramids. When the audio and visual channels are combined to produce 'a text' the translation process takes a different form and is subjected to a different list of constraints that need professional awareness, examination and creative solutions. With the increasing reliance on the Internet, smart phones and computers the traditional concepts of education and entertainment are constantly blurred. Indeed, the concept of *edutainment* is fast changing the way technical literature is produced and marketed. Gamal (2013) points out that the term 'edutainment' has no direct translation into Arabic, yet.

As discussed above, translation conferences in the Arab world, and despite the expertise of faculty, the established national translation organisations and the generous translation awards, continue to ignore audiovisual translation issues. Attention to audiovisual translation exceeds subtitling films and notwithstanding the large volume of subtitling foreign (mostly American) programs into Arabic. For instance, translating government web-sites should be given the utmost care and attention. A web site that is visited and seen by the whole world must be translated with the utmost care and supervised by a professional team of translators proficient in dealing with text in digital formats. For example, the web site of the Saudi city of Medina which celebrates the 2013 Islamic City of Culture could have benefited from an audiovisual translator who in addition to correctly translating the original text into English would be able to advise on other equally significant issues such as content, suitability and compatibility of text and images. This notion of the audiovisual translator working as a consultant escapes many people who are unable to see the link between text and image. There are some successful examples of multilingual web sites in Oman, Jordan, Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Lebanon and they deserve being examined as case studies both academically and professionally.

Stamps and postcards

The age of postage stamps, postcards and posters, inserts, leaflets and special lift-outs is completely gone now. It is pedagogically insightful to observe that research on the translation of these publications from Arabic into English (and other languages) did not receive sufficient attention as can be judged from the papers and presentations at Arab translation conferences in the last two decades. The translation of the verbo-visual text, information and indirect messages constitutes the success and indeed the crux of the ability to carry meaning implied in verbo-visual texts to another language and culture. Despite the outmoded material of stamps and postcards they would make an interesting, if not intriguing, translation exercise in class. For example, on an Egyptian postage stamp celebrating the National Nursing Day the image on the stamp is that of a female and the Arabic lexical item for nurse is actually the feminine. This is because 'nurse' in Arabic is always a female. A postcard from New Zealand showing the map of the country consisting of three islands: the north island, the south island and the west island contains a humorous message that is difficult to translate. New Zealand has only two islands and the west island is actually Australia! It is the rivalry between *big* Australia and *small* New Zealand in Rugby that belies the humour. These socio-linguistic features of the outmoded publicity material continue in the now ever-increasing format of audiovisual material. Translation scholars, researchers, trainers as well as practitioners need to be aware of these features not only to accurately translate them but, and more significantly, to successfully carry over the meaning to the new filmic format which is moving, transient, rapid, and mixed with other features such as images, colour, music, etc. (Gambier: 2006).

Explaining the significance of audiovisual translation to academics, film makers, politicians, industry professionals and translation students is both important and vital (Diaz Cintas 2004). It is important because the age of the verbo-visual message is gone and is now superseded by the audio-visual and it is vital because many uninitiated decision-makers and untrained practitioners cannot see the difference.

In the new domain of audiovisual translation, meaning is constructed and consumed through a screen, by a new consumer whose taste, interests and accessibility of information is vastly different from the consumer of a generation earlier (Negm: 2009). This fact, as clearly demonstrated in the Arab Spring, should convince those reluctant to see the significance of audiovisual translation. To illustrate this further, with concrete examples, one has to examine the official and popular response to the New Seven Wonders competition (www.new7wonders.com) in its various stages in 2007 and 2011. The competition, an online activity, was targeting young people and designed to create a modern list of seven 'new' wonders by direct voting. The Egyptian government failed to appreciate the power of the Internet and the significance of the 'young voter' who was attracted to the new style of international online voting. When the Egyptian pyramids were excluded from the competition of the seven "new" wonders, the Antiquities Department in Egypt indignantly dismissed the competition as unofficial, which is true, but it attacked the significance of the whole exercise. This is where Cairo went wrong. The opportunity could have been better seized by creating a rival web site dedicated to the pyramids and translated into a hundred languages. The Antiquities Department could have commissioned a special DVD subtitled in up to 40 languages (Carroll: 2004) or a promotional activity marketing the Pyramids on the then famous voting day of 07/07/07. Egypt did not even produce any of the old verbo-visual material of marketing: not a single stamp or postcard was produced. It is estimated that 8 million Egyptians live and work abroad:

sending a Pyramid postcard with a 'Pyramid' stamp to each one of these expatriates would have sent a message 'abroad'. Similarly, Petra, in Jordan, which went on to win enough votes to join the seven 'new' wonders did nothing after the online activity was concluded. Again, the opportunity which called for an audiovisual response was lost: no documentary or a DVD was produced. The National *Al-Urduniya* (The Jordanian) TV channel quite often runs a 25-minute documentary on Jordan titled "An open air museum" but only in Arabic with no subtitles. The same documentary could be shown in Arabic but with several versions of subtitles since *Al-Urduniya* is the kingdom's international satellite channel serving as the façade to the Kingdom. In November 2011, Jordan, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates failed to appreciate the lesson of the Egyptian Pyramids and The City of Petra. After the Arab Spring, all three governments failed to capitalize on the opportunity and to deal with the audio-visual challenge. No activity, save a limited coverage in the local media and mostly *in Arabic*, was sponsored to promote the candidate sites of the Dead Sea (Jordan), the Jaeta Caves (Lebanon) or the Bu Tinah Island (UAE) internationally and not surprisingly all failed to collect enough votes on the famous voting day of 11/11/11.

Saudi cinema abroad

The examples cited and discussed above aim to show that audiovisual translation requires a different mindset that appreciates the power of the Internet and the multimodal nature of audiovisual text utilized in marketing and promotion. Other examples abound and Arab cinema is perhaps one significant domain that remains oblivious to the significance of academic examination audiovisual translation. On the one hand, Egyptian cinema industry, the largest in the region, is unaware of the damage done through the unprofessional subtitling of its masterpieces on DVD. On the other hand, new and emerging Arab cinemas in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Palestine are equally oblivious to how detrimental unprofessional or inadequate subtitling could be to their chances of success. It must be remembered that new Arab cinemas are fighting an uphill battle for recognition. With no audience at home, Jordanian, Saudi and Emirati film makers exhibit their films abroad. For any chance of winning crowds, and awards, the films need to be carefully, if not perfectly, subtitled. In 2006, the so-called first Saudi film *Keif-el-hal* (how are you?) was produced on DVD and subtitled into English. However, the quality of the subtitles could have been better if it was carried out by a subtitler and not by a film-dialogue translator. Inadequate subtitles attract attention to them and deprive foreign viewers of the opportunity to follow and appreciate the film. In a meeting in Sydney with Saudi female film director Haifa Al-Mansour after she attended the screening of her first film *Wajda* in June 2013, she conceded that subtitling is an area that she needs to concentrate on. It is true, however, that most film makers do not seem to care, much, about the subtitling of their films abroad (Ivarsson and Carroll: 1998). Yet, when a film maker who does not have an audience at home and is showing her films abroad, as in the case of Al-Mansour and other Jordanian and Palestinian directors and producers, subtitling must be thought of as a part and parcel of film making, and not merely a post-production part.

Links with industry

While translation departments and translation conferences in the Arab world continue to disregard audiovisual translation, political and social changes in the Arab world are forcing the media and translation professions to reconsider their positions. The youthful population in the Arab world, estimated at 40% under the age of 25, have

taken the lead in espousing digital technology as a vehicle for change. The spread of social media, citizen journalism, multiplicity of sources, blogs, forums, crowd sourcing, and the ease of publication online with audio, video and visual elements will have tremendous impact on the political, social and academic scene in the Arab world.

Translation departments will perhaps realize the significance of audiovisual translation when they start to look for professional alliance with industry. The academic 'ivory tower' image and style of existence is no longer tenable and academia must be responsive not only to what the market needs but also to what the society wants. Academia will benefit from an alliance with the cinema industry, the media, the ministry of tourism and the IT industry. Audiovisual translation requires a strong link between the IT world and the translation department and this is perhaps a sound and strong link that will benefit both the professors and the graduates in the long run (Gamal: 2012).

The translation departments in the Arab world are faced with some unique challenges that were not seen a generation ago. Today, Arabic is under threat. Almost all the hard sciences are taught in English, except in Syria, and there is an over reliance on English as the primary source of information in almost all fields. Moreover, the Internet has given boost to the local and regional Arabic vernacular to the detriment of the refined and educated register of Modern Standard Arabic. English is invading and violating spoken Arabic for no linguistic reasons save trendiness. Finally, the Arabic language content is almost non-existent online which, if left unchecked, will enhance the notion that Arabic is inadequate as a language of instruction and education. The social and cultural consequences could be costly.

Despite the state of flux in the Arab world in the wake of the Arab Spring, there are some good phenomena that should be examined and, if possible, capitalized upon. There is a clear level of maturity in the use of digital technology. It is obvious that some of the youth of today have grown up playing Game Boy and PlayStation. They saw laptops become affordable and digital cameras accessible both technically and financially. While their parents grew up with television and their grandparents with radio, the young today are growing up with the WiFi, GPS and information at their fingertips. What needs to be done is to capitalize on this tendency by embarking on teaching subjects that increase digital literacy in a society that still suffers from illiteracy. Creating content online and translating it (subtitling, dubbing or voice over) has become an essential skill. Likewise, same language subtitling has a direct benefit and impact on reading habits, enhancing the native language and encouraging literacy. Fan subbing is another phenomenon that has received little attention by Arab scholars despite the fact that fan subbing has been around for almost a decade and a half. What is relevant here is the exhibited skill in devising strategies in subtitling despite some of the no-holds-barred approach to translating some American expletives. This energy need to be channelled through well thought-out programs and policies by both academics and technocrats.

Conclusion

Political changes in the Arab world are taking place at a much faster rate than before and the situation remains nebulous at best. However, in times of flux, efforts need to be far-sighted. In this paper, the impact of digital technology on the young is examined with the view of highlighting the significance of digital literacy. It also notes that film literacy is lacking and that alphabetic illiteracy is high in large sectors

of the community. Despite these two observations, translation departments in the Arab world need not reinvent the wheel. Audiovisual Translation Studies (ATS) could provide the solution and lead the way in creating opportunities for academic researchers and graduates alike. In this research it is suggested that digital literacy needs to be viewed as a separate skill and needs to be included as an essential part of the new discipline of audio-visual translation.

The digital age needs a new set of ethos and skills and these are best introduced early and through practical, hands-on and relevant topics. It is no longer sustainable to have a static web presence or a section under-construction for too long or a site translated only into English and French. Audiovisual translation is a new form and format of cultural and technical transfer that is on 24/7 and combines various channels that contribute to meaning making over and above text, image and sound.

Writing in the pre-digital age of 1971 Egyptian philosopher Zaki Naguib Mahmoud points out the significance of striking a balance between modern western sciences and traditional Arab values. He argues that “translating more and more books into Arabic is not the solution but rather a new balanced culture that combines the old with the new” (1993:6). Faced with the challenges of globalisation, the Internet, social media, the digital divide and the neglect of Arabic among its speakers Mahmoud’s words make more sense today than they did then. Audiovisual translation studies in Arabic are yet to make their debut locally and regionally and it is hoped that digital literacy will be part and parcel of this new genre of translation studies. Its early inclusion in the program will prove beneficial in the long run.

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